



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 230523-0136; RTID 0648-XD467]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries Off West Coast States; Pacific Coast

Groundfish Fishery; 2023 Tribal Fishery Allocations for Pacific Whiting;

Reapportionment Between Tribal and Non-Tribal Sectors

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Inseason reapportionment of tribal Pacific whiting allocation.

SUMMARY: This document announces the reapportionment of 45,000 metric tons of Pacific whiting from the tribal allocation to the non-tribal commercial fishery sectors via automatic action on September 27, 2023. This reapportionment is to allow full utilization of the Pacific whiting resource.

DATES: The reapportionment of Pacific whiting went into effect at 12 p.m. local time, September 27, 2023, and is effective through December 31, 2023. Comments will be accepted through *[insert date 15 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER]*.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2023-0130 by the following method:

Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and enter NOAA–NMFS–2023-0130 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method to any other address or

individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address, *etc.*), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Electronic Access

This notification is accessible online at the Office of the Federal Register's website at <https://www.federalregister.gov>. Background information and documents are available at the NMFS West Coast Region website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/west-coast>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Colin Sayre, West Coast Region, NMFS, (206) 526-4656, Colin.Sayre@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Pacific Whiting

Pacific whiting (*Merluccius productus*) is a very productive species with highly variable recruitment (the biomass of fish that mature and enter the fishery each year) and a relatively short life span compared to other groundfish species. Pacific whiting has the largest annual allowable harvest levels (by volume) of the more than 90 groundfish species managed under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which governs the groundfish fishery off Washington, Oregon, and California. The coastwide Pacific whiting stock is managed jointly by the United States and Canada, and mature Pacific whiting are commonly available to vessels operating in U.S. waters from April through December. Background on the stock assessment, and the establishment of

the 2023 Total Allowable Catch (TAC), for Pacific whiting was provided in the final rule for the 2023 Pacific whiting harvest specifications, published May 31, 2023 (88 FR 34783). Pacific whiting is allocated to the Pacific Coast treaty tribes (tribal fishery) and to three non-tribal commercial sectors: the catcher/processor cooperative (C/P Co-op), the mothership cooperative (MS Co-op), and the Shorebased Individual Fishery Quota (IFQ) Program.

This notification announces the reapportionment of 45,000 metric tons (mt) of Pacific whiting from the tribal allocation to the non-tribal commercial sectors. This reapportionment was effective on September 27, 2023. Regulations at 50 CFR 660.131(h) contain provisions that allow the Regional Administrator to reapportion Pacific whiting from the tribal allocation, specified at 50 CFR 660.50, that will not be harvested by the end of the fishing year to other sectors.

Pacific Whiting Reapportionment

For 2023, the Pacific Coast treaty tribes were allocated 80,806 mt of Pacific whiting. The best available information on September 15, 2023, indicated that at least 45,000 mt of the tribal allocation would not be harvested by December 31, 2023. As required under the 2017 Endangered Species Act section 7(a)(2) biological opinion on the effects of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan on listed salmonids, NMFS considered the number and bycatch rate of Chinook salmon taken by the Pacific whiting fishery sectors prior to reapportionment. Based on the best available information in September 2023, NMFS determined there is low risk that the reapportionment will cause the Pacific whiting sector fisheries to exceed both the guideline limit of 11,000 and reserve of 3,500 Chinook salmon under current regulations and practices. At the time of this notification, incidental take of Chinook salmon by the non-tribal sectors is 37 percent of the guideline limit. NMFS will continue to monitor Chinook salmon bycatch as part of inseason management.

To allow for increased utilization of the resource, on September 27, 2023, NMFS reapportioned 45,000 mt from the tribal allocation to the Shorebased IFQ Program, C/P Co-op, and MS Co-op in proportion to each sector's original allocation. Reapportioning this amount is expected to allow for greater attainment of the TAC while not limiting tribal harvest opportunities for the remainder of the year. NMFS provided notice of the reapportionment on September 27, 2023, via emails sent directly to fishing businesses and individuals. Reapportionment was effective the same day as the notice.

The amounts of Pacific whiting available for 2023 before and after the reapportionment are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1 -- 2023 Pacific Whiting Allocations

Sector	Initial 2023 Allocation (mt)	Final 2023 Allocation (mt)
Tribal	80,806	35,806
C/P Coop	129,266	144,566
MS Coop	91,246	102,047
Shorebased IFQ Program	159,681	178,581

Classification

NOAA's Assistant Administrator for Fisheries (AA) finds that good cause exists for this notification to be issued without affording prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), because such notification would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. As previously noted, NMFS provided actual notice of the reapportionment to fishery participants at the time of the action. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment on this reapportionment was impracticable because NMFS had insufficient time to provide prior notice between the time the information about the progress of the fishery needed to make this determination became available and the time at which fishery modifications had to be implemented in order to

allow fishery participants access to the available fish during the remainder of the fishing season. For the same reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness for these actions, required under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

These actions are authorized by 50 CFR 660.55(i), 660.60(d), and 660.131(h) and are exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.* and 16 U.S.C. 7001 *et seq.*

Dated: October 30, 2023.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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